

Message Text

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INFO AMCONSUL LENINGRAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MOSCOW 6064

E.O. 11652 XGDS-4

TAGS: PINT, UR

SUBJECT: CONTRASTING SIGNALS IN THE CULTURAL/IDEOLOGICAL FIELD

1. SUMMARY. THE REGIME HAS TOUGHENED UP ITS POLICY TOWARD HUMAN RIGHTS LEADERS AND OTHER POLITICAL DISSIDENTS, WHILE IN THE FIELD OF CULTURAL POLICY SOME FLEXIBILITY AND CONCERN FOR THE SOVIET IMAGE IN THE WEST ARE BEING SHOWN. THE MIXED RESULTS IN THE CULTURAL/IDEOLOGICAL AREA INDICATE SOME DRIFT AND A LACK OF STRONG LEADERSHIP AND DEFINITE GUIDELINES, PERHAPS RESULTING FROM BREZHNEV'S LONG ILLNESS AND THE NON-FILLING OF THE DEMICHEV SLOT IN THE SECRETARIAT. THE CURRENT FERMENT MAY BE AN ADVANCE SIGNAL OF SOME OF THE BATTLES WHICH WILL BE WAGED AS THE PARTY APPROACHES NEXT YEAR'S CONGRESS. END SUMMARY.

2. DISSIDENTS WHO HAVE CHALLENGED THE REGIME'S INTERNAL POLICIES APPEAR TO BE IN FOR HARD TIMES. IN THE AREA OF JEWISH EMIGRATION, THE SHTERN, LEVIYEV, AND NASHPITS-TSETLENOK TRIALS, THE NASTY BEHAVIOR OF THE MILITIA AT MOSCOW'S CENTRAL SYNAGOGUE DURING PASSOVER, AND THE CONTINUED HARASSMENT OF JEWISH ACTIVISTS INDICATE A GENERALLY HARDER OFFICIAL LINE. WHILE HARASSMENT OF JEWISH ACTIVITSTS IN NOTHING NEW, THE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS SHOW A MORE PURPOSEFUL, TOUGHER REGIME ATTITUDE. IN ANY CASE, IT HAS BEEN MADE CLEAR THAT THE RECENT GRANTING OF EXIT VISAS TO SEVERAL JEWISH ACTIVISTS WAS NOT MEANT TO BE A POSITIVE SIGNAL

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TO THEIR COLLEAGUES OR TO POTENTIAL EMIGRANTS. A LACK OF CONCERN

FOR THE IMPRESSIONS THIS HARDER LINE CREATES IN THE WEST HAS ALSO BEEN APPARENT.

3. THE HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT CENTERING AROUND SAKHAROV HAS ALSO RECENTLY BEEN HANDLED MORE ROUGHLY. THE ARREST OF DISSIDENT ACTIVIST ANDREY TVERDOKHLEBOV AND THE DETENTION AND/OR SEARCHING OF THE APARTMENTS BY THE KGB OF FOUR OF HIS COLLEAGUES, ALL OF WHOM ARE MEMBERS OF THE SMALL SOVIET AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CHAPTER, IS ONLY THE LATEST DEVELOPMENT IN A MORE SEVERE OFFICIAL POLICY TOWARD POLITICAL DISSIDENTS. SINCE LATE LAST YEAR, THE AUTHORITIES HAVE TRIED MORE ACTIVELY TO REPRESS DISSIDENT RELIGIOUS GROUPS -- LITHUANIAN CATHOLICS, BAPTISTS, AND MOST RECENTLY THE PENTACOSTALISTS -- AND THEY HAVE ARRESTED AND SHIPPED OFF TO LITHUANIA ONE OF SAKHAROV'S COLLEAGUES, SERGEY KOVALEV, FOR HIS ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF LITHUANIAN CATHOLICS. THEY HAVE WARNED ROY MEDVEDEV ABOUT HIS ACTIVITIES, HAVE SENTENCED ANATOLIY MARCHENKO TO FIVE MORE YEARS EXILE, AND ARE THREATENING THE DISSIDENT "SLAVOPHILE" VLADIMIR OSIPOV WITH CONFINEMENT IN A MENTAL INSTITUTION. THEY HAVE REPORTEDLY BROKEN UP A SMALL ARMENIAN NATIONALIST GROUP AND, ACCORDING TO SOVIET CONTACTS, ARE GOING AFTER DISSIDENTS IN GEORGIA. THEY HAVE ALSO KEPT UP THE PRESSURE ON SAKHAROV HIMSELF, MOST RECENTLY BY REFUSING TO ALLOW HIS WIFE TO TRAVEL ABROAD FOR MEDICAL TREATMENT.

4. SOME DISSIDENTS SEE THE CURRENT CRACKDOWN IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS FIELD AS A SIGN OF GREATER REGIME CONFIDENCE THAT IT CAN GET AWAY WITH TOUGHER INTERNAL POLICIES WITHOUT DOING THE COUNTRY TOO MUCH HARM IN THE WEST. ACCORDING TO THIS THEORY, SOVIET INTERNAL SECURITY OFFICIALS VIEW THE WEST AS SO PREOCCUPIED WITH ITS OWN PROBLEMS THAT THE PLIGHT OF HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS IS OF ONLY MINOR IMPORTANCE. IN SUCH CIRCUMSTANCES, AND EVEN WITH CSCE MOVING TOWARD THE END OF ITS SECOND STAGE, THE AUTHORITIES PRESUMABLY SENSE THAT THE TIME IS RIGHT TO DEAL SEVERELY WITH THE DISSIDENT MOVEMENT. THE ROLE OF TVERDOKHLEBOV, WHO HAS ACTED AS AN ORGANIZER AND CONSULTANT ON HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS WITHIN THE SAKHAROV CIRCLE AND WHO SET UP THE AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL CHAPTER, WAS A KEY ONE. HIS REMOVAL FROM THE SCENE FOR AN UNDETERMINED TIME WILL BE A SEVERE BLOW FOR THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, ALREADY WEAKENED BY DEPARTURES, ARRESTS AND OTHER HARASSMENT.

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5. IN LESS DIRECTLY POLITICAL AREAS OF CULTURE AND IDEOLOGY, HOWEVER, THE PICTURE IS MORE MIXED. IN SOME NOTABLE CASES THE AUTHORITIES HAVE ACTED FLEXIBLY, UNDOUBTEDLY WITH AN EYE TO WESTERN PUBLIC OPINION. MOSCOW AND LENINGRAD NON-CONFORMISTS ARTISTS HAVE STAGED SEVERAL EXHIBITIONS AND ARE CURRENTLY RUNNING ANOTHER SERIES OF SHOWS AND DISCUSSIONS IN MOSCOW APARTMENTS AND STUDIOS WITHOUT MAJOR HARASSMENT FROM THE POLICE. IN FACT, A LEADING UNOFFICIAL ARTIST TOLD AN EMBOFF RECENTLY THAT THE ARTISTS'

GROUP HAD BEEN PROMISED THERE WOULD BE NO MILITIA "PROVOCATION" AT THE SHOWS. THE ARTISTS ARE NOW NEGOTIATING WITH THE AUTHORITIES FOR AN OUTDOOR SHOW IN LENINGRAD ON MAY 25 AND FOR ANOTHER EXHIBITION "IN THE OPEN AIR" IN MOSCOW LATER THIS SUMMER. WHILE THEY HAVE NOT RECEIVED POSITIVE REPLIES, NEITHER HAVE THEY RECEIVED DEFINITE TURNDOWNS. OTHER CASES, SUCH AS THAT OF SCULPTOR ERNST NEIZVESTNY, WHO WAS RECENTLY THROWN OUT OF THE ARTISTS UNION BUT WHO CONTINUES TO HOPE FOR OFFICIAL APPROVAL OF A LONG VISIT ABROAD, AND AUTHOR VASILY AKSENOV, WHO RECEIVED PERMISSION FOR A TOUR AS GUEST LECTURER AT UCLA, DESPITE OFFICIAL WRITERS UNION DISAPPROVAL, DEMONSTRATE THAT NON-CONFORMISTS CAN SEEK, AND SOMETIMES FIND, SUPPORT IN SECTIONS OF THE PARTY APPARATUS WHICH TAKE THE COUNTRY'S INTERNATIONAL IMAGE INTO ACCOUNT.

6. COMMENT: OUR CONTACTS HERE HAVE TOLD US OF A GENERAL FEELING OF MALAISE AND A LACK OF DIRECTION AND GUIDANCE IN THE CULTURAL AREA. THIS MAY BE DUE IN PART TO DEMICHEV'S MOVE TO THE CULTURE MINISTRY AND THE NON-FILLING OF HIS CULTURAL/IDEOLOGY SLOT IN THE SECRETARIAT, A KEY POSITION FROM WHICH GENERAL POLICY GUIDELINES ARE SENT DOWN THE PARTY AND GOVERNMENT LADDER. THE LACK OF A DEFINITE SOURCE OF AUTHORITY IN THE FIELD OF CULTURE HAS APPARENTLY RESULTED IN INDIVIDUALS IN THE BUREAUCRACY HAVING TO MAKE UNACCUSTOMED DECISIONS ON THEIR OWN, WITH THE ANTICIPATED CONTRADICTORY RESULTS.

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7. A PLAUSIBLE THEORY BEING ADVANCED WITH RESPECT TO DISSIDENTS,

IS THAT BREZHNEV'S LONG ILLNESS EARLIER THIS YEAR CREATED A TEMPORARY VACUUM WHICH INTERNAL SECURITY MINDED LEADERS USED TO ADVANCE THEIR POSITIONS MORE FORCEFULLY, AND GAIN AUTHORIZATION FOR STRONG ACTIONS AGAINST THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT. CULTURAL NON-CONFORMISTS WERE APPARENTLY CONSIDERED LESS IMPORTANT AND POLICY TOWARD THEM WAS ALLOWED TO DRIFT, THUS OFFERING THEM SOME LEVERAGE IN PURSUING THEIR OBJECTIVES. OVER THE LONG RUN, HOWEVER, THEIR ACTIVITIES, TOO, PRESENT A THREAT TO THE SYSTEM OF CONTROL, AND THE QUESTION, WHICH THEY THEMSELVES ARE ASKING, IS WHETHER THE GAINS THEY HAVE ACHIEVED WILL BE EMPHEMERAL.

8. OF COURSE, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE CURRENT FERMENT IN THE CULTURAL/IDEOLOGICAL FIELD IS AN ADVANCE INDICATION OF SOME OF THE BATTLES WHICH WILL BE WAGED AS THE PARTY APPROACHES NEXT YEAR'S CONGRESS. CULTURAL POLICY AND IDEOLOGY, AND THE WAY THE REGIME DEALS WITH ISSUES SUCH AS EMIGRATION, POLITICAL DISSIDENCE AND NON-CONFORMISM, ARE WIDOWS ON THE POLITICAL PROCESS IN THE UPPER REACHES OF THE PARTY, AND BEAR WATCHING FOR SIGNS OF PROBLEMS, ALLIANCES BEING FORMED, AND JOCKEYING FOR POSITION, IN WHAT SOME SEE AS A TRANSITIONAL PERIOD LEADING UP TO AN EVENTUAL CHANGING OF THE GUARD.

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